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The President's Daily Brief

31 December 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

31 December 1971

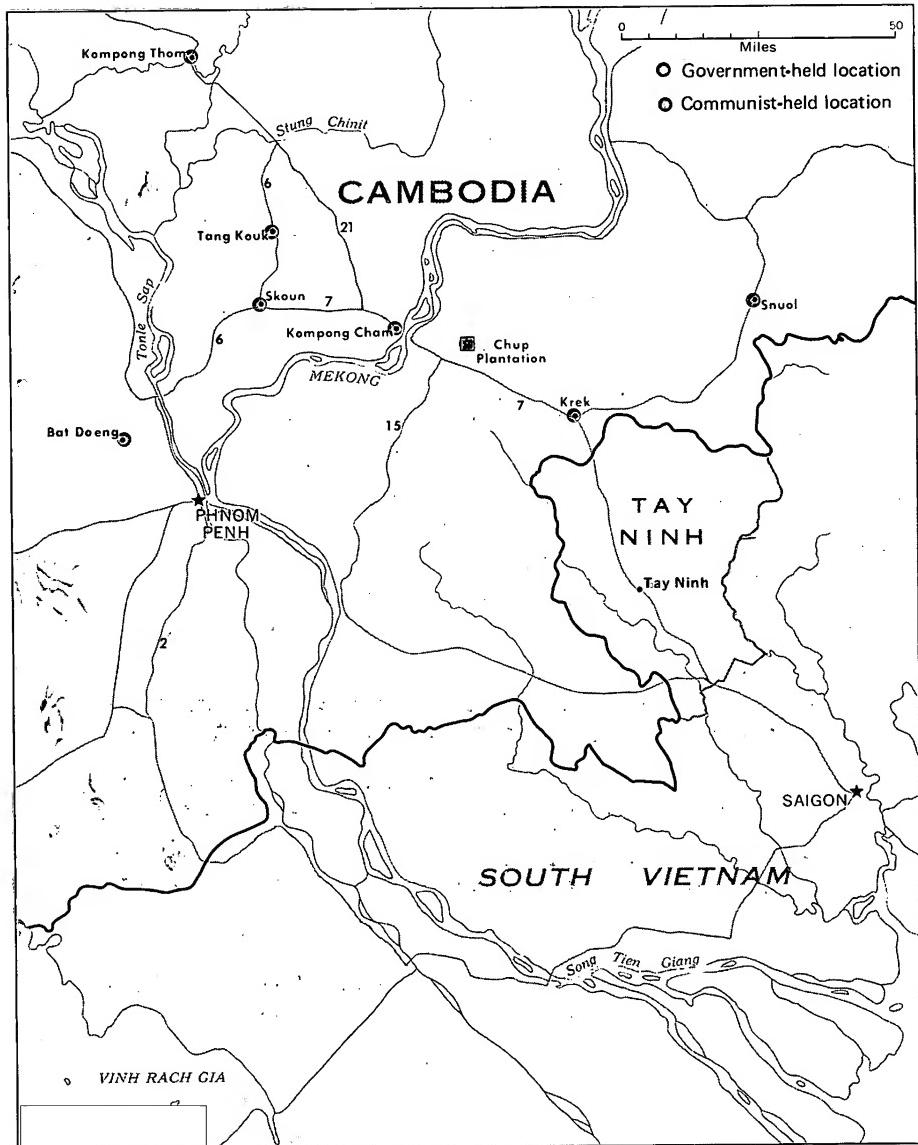
PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Some South Vietnamese forces are returning home from their operation in eastern Cambodia. (Page 1)

The USSR may soon make a commitment to help revive the Bangladesh economy. (Page 2)

The North Vietnamese are probing Laotian Government positions around Long Tieng. (Page 3)

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SOUTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIA

Concerned about the reinforcement of Communist forces in the central highlands and an increasing enemy threat along the western approaches to Saigon, General Minh is reducing the number of troops operating in eastern Cambodia. Of the 11,000 committed to the operation against the Chup plantation, some 3,000 are being withdrawn, and it is likely that more will follow. A residual force will stay behind to maintain important forward bases, however.

South Vietnamese tactics in eastern Cambodia have been cautious and conservative during the past six weeks. General Minh's forces, mindful of the heavy losses incurred during their withdrawal from Snuol last May, made no sustained effort to push deep into enemy bases and storage areas.

We have no evidence that the South Vietnamese uncovered any sizable caches, and the only significant contact with the Communists took place in the Dambe area. The South Vietnamese moved out of the southern part of the Chup plantation when it appeared that several enemy regiments were in position to go into action against them. For their part, enemy units seemed content merely to harass South Vietnamese positions.

Despite the lack of outstanding successes, the South Vietnamese operation no doubt disrupted normal enemy logistics activity and kept Communist forces in the area off balance, but the hope that the operation would help relieve pressure on Cambodian troops along Route 6 was not realized.

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USSR-INDIA-BANGLADESH

The Soviets are negotiating a trade and technical assistance pact with Bangladesh.

Although the USSR is clearly willing to help revive the economy of Bangladesh, these negotiations also appear aimed at countering Indian and Bengali pressure for more formal Soviet recognition. Moscow hopes to maintain some presence in Islamabad and does not want to be too far out in front in establishing formal relations with Bangladesh. Much of the Soviet assistance represents a reinstatement of projects in Bangladesh disrupted by civil strife and hostilities.

Soviet assistance supplements that of India. New Delhi thus far has agreed to provide financial aid and administrative expertise. It presumably will play a major role in helping to manage the newly nationalized jute industry.

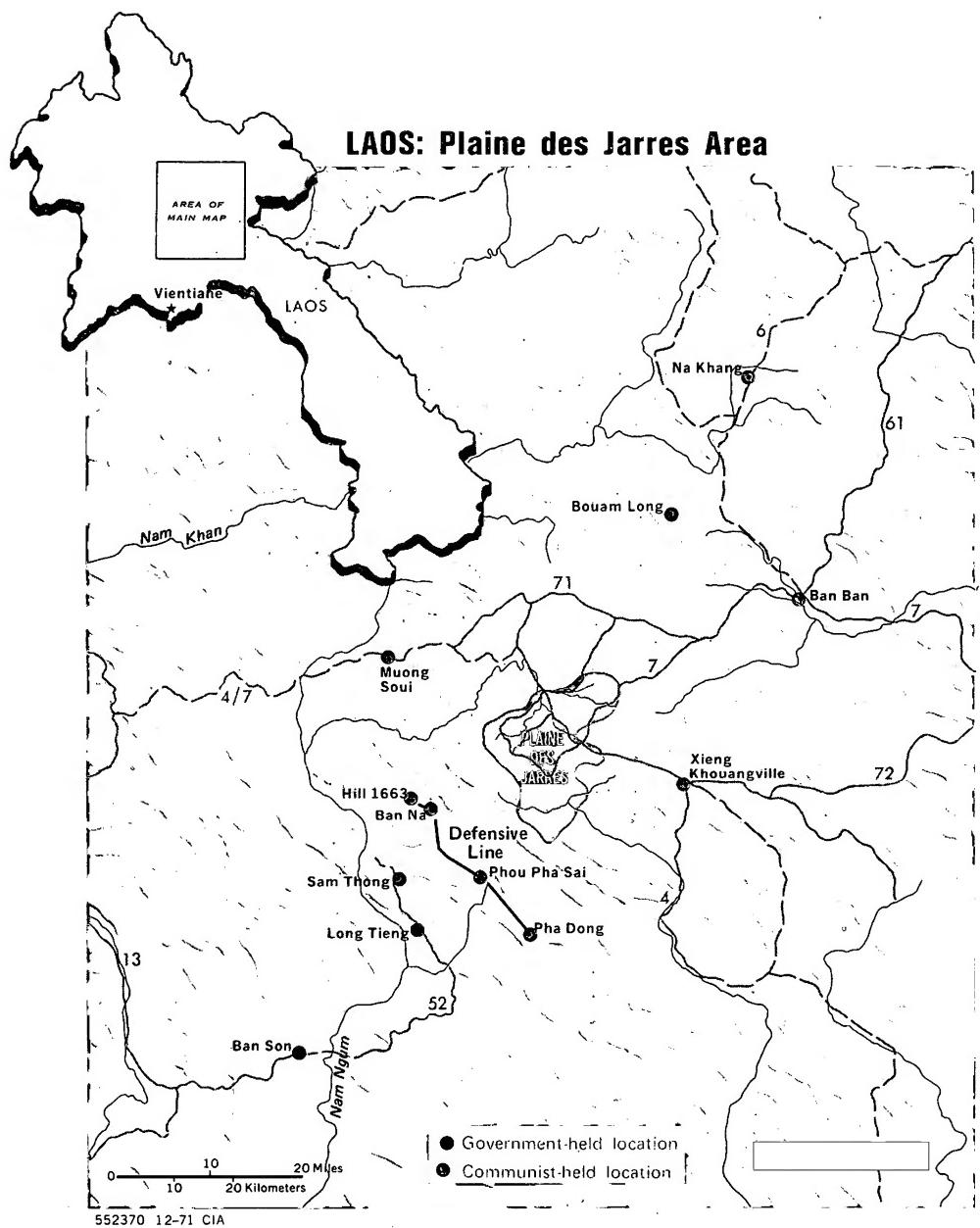
Moscow and New Delhi, however, cannot meet Dacca's enormous aid requirements and Western donors eventually will be called on to provide substantial assistance.

Bangladesh authorities, meanwhile, are reported to have made some headway in establishing an administrative structure. Although non-Bengalis are still having serious difficulties in some localities, the combined efforts of the government, the Indians, and some Mukti Bahini units apparently have prevented a widespread collapse of law and order. [redacted]

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NOTES

Laos: The North Vietnamese are probing and shelling government positions in the defensive line northeast of Long Tieng, but have launched no significant ground attacks. The enemy also is placing troops and supplies to the east of Long Tieng. At Ban Son, a refugee center 20 miles southwest of Long Tieng, the government is refurbishing an air-strip to handle T-28 aircraft so that there will be an alternate to the Long Tieng strip.

USSR - North Vietnam: The Soviets are making a propaganda show in reaction to the US bombings of North Vietnam. Yesterday they issued a government statement condemning the air raids, and later announced through TASS that they would give Hanoi additional free military assistance. The main Soviet aid pact for 1972 was signed on 7 October. The Soviets seem to be trying to keep a step ahead of the Chinese, who reacted to the bombings with a less authoritative statement issued by their Foreign Ministry.

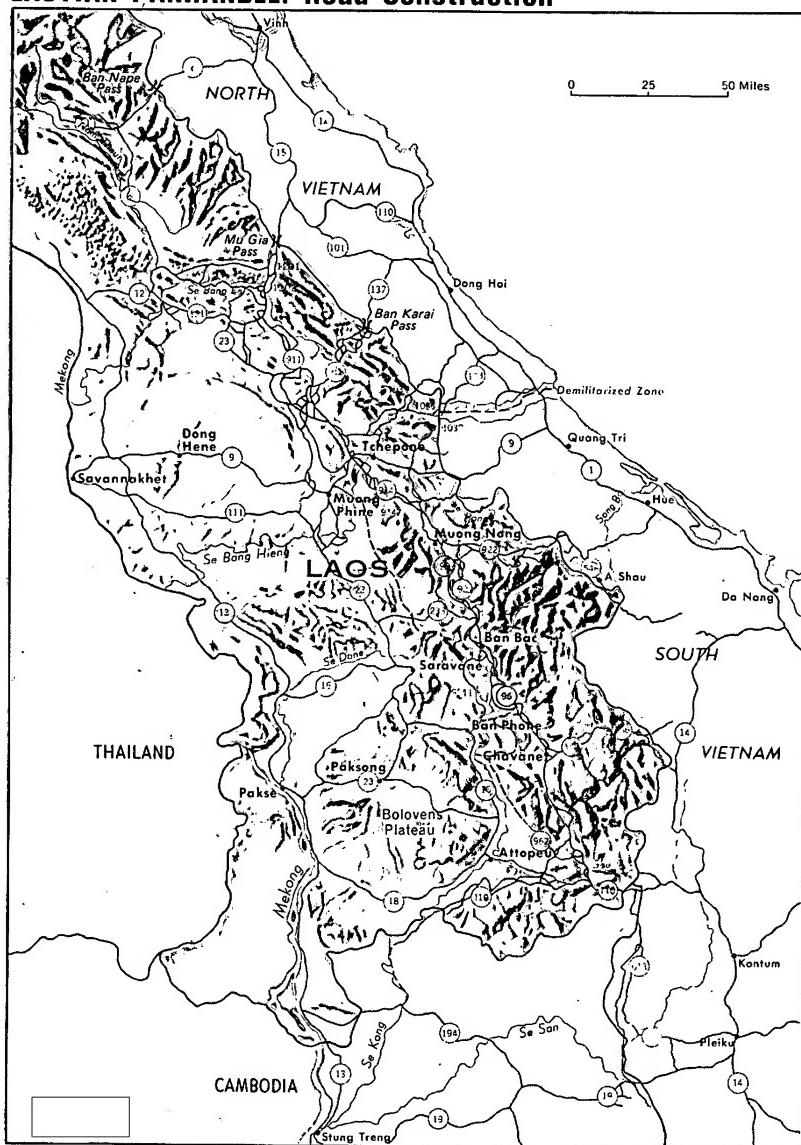
Honduras: [redacted]

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LAOTIAN PANHANDLE: Road Construction



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Malta-UK: Although he may still hope that he can pressure the British into a compromise, Mintoff apparently is taking no chances and took a quick trip to Libya yesterday seeking a commitment for long-term cash aid. The Libyan Government helped Mintoff financially prior to and after his election. Tripoli might be disposed again to come to his assistance, at least partially, even though the Libyans may be disillusioned by Mintoff's preference for dealing with the British before negotiating with them. At home, Mintoff so far retains the support of the ruling Maltese Labor Party and the opposition remains indecisive. British forces on the island face harassment and possibly hostile demonstrations beginning 1 January, [redacted]

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Laos: Photography of November and December shows a 53-mile north-south road almost completed through the central panhandle that runs parallel to and between Routes 23 and 99. In the Ban Phone area, two other roads are under construction eastward from the Se Kong River. These new roads, and additions that are being made to existing roads, will improve access to south Laos, the tri-border area, and Cambodia, and will provide additional alternates to choke points in the central panhandle.

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